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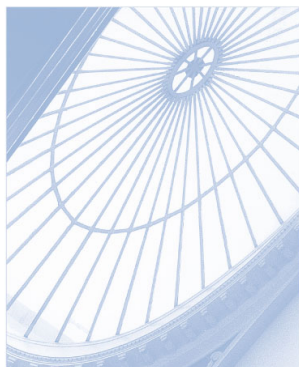
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JOHANNES LAUDAGE, *Friedrich Barbarossa (1152–1190): Eine Biografie*, ed. Lars Hageneier and Matthias Schrör (Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 383 pp. ISBN 978 3 7917 2167 5. €34.90

Frederick Barbarossa might not be the most famous medieval emperor as the dust jacket of Laudage's biography claims, but he certainly contends for that title with Charlemagne and Barbarossa's own grandson, Frederick II. Indeed, his reign is one of the most studied periods in medieval history and he has been the subject of numerous biographies in various languages, quite a few of which have been published recently.¹ The English reader, however, still relies on works published forty years ago that by now are certainly outdated.² There are good reasons for Frederick's enduring legacy and fame through the centuries, since he was deeply involved in expanding the influence of the Holy Roman Empire, enjoyed a long and remarkably stable rule in Germany (relatively speaking), was engaged in a momentous struggle with the papacy and the Lombard city communes, and had extensive contacts with the other Christian rulers in Europe and the Mediterranean, not to mention the crusade that he undertook and during which he died. Frederick came very close to killing the autonomy of the Italian city-states shortly after their birth, to re-establishing imperial control over the papacy, and to expanding his hegemony in the Mediterranean as well. A recent series of conferences has also underlined the profound influence of his reign on the development of public law.³ Therefore it would be good to have an updated biography of Frederick Barbarossa in English, one that

¹ e.g. Franco Cardini, *Il Barbarossa: Vita, trionfi e illusioni di Federico I imperatore* (Milan, 1985), reprinted with bibliographical updates; S. Gasparri, *Federico Barbarossa* (Florence, 1996); Ferdinand Opll, *Friedrich Barbarossa* (Darmstadt, 1990), also reprinted with bibliographical updates; Pierre Racine, *Frédéric Barberousse (1152–1190)* (Paris, 2009).

² The most recent biographies of Frederick in English are Peter Munz, *Frederick Barbarossa: A Study in Medieval Politics* (London, 1969) and Marcel Pacaut, *Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (London, 1970).

³ For the influence of Frederick's reign on the development of public law see Gerhard Dilcher and Diego Quaglioni (eds.), *Gli inizi del diritto pubblico. L'età di Federico Barbarossa: legislazione e scienza del diritto. Die Anfänge des Öffentlichen Rechts: Gesetzgebung im Zeitalter Friedrich Barbarossas und das Gelehrte Recht* (Bologna, 2007); eid. (eds.), *Gli inizi del diritto pubblico. ii. Da*

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also showcases and sums up the most recent research, since this has adopted new approaches and immensely furthered our understanding of Frederick's life and world. This could perhaps be achieved by translating one of the biographies published recently.

Laudage was in a very good position to write a biography of Frederick Barbarossa, having worked on his reign, and in particular, his relations with his main opponent, Pope Alexander III, for his *Habilitationsschrift*, which was published as a monograph more than a decade ago.⁴ However, in order to evaluate Laudage's biography of Barbarossa it is necessary to keep in mind two issues, namely, that it was aimed at a wider audience than a purely academic one, and, above all, that it was unfinished when Laudage died in a traffic accident at the beginning of 2008. As the work was at a very advanced stage, it was decided to publish it with the help of Lars Hageneier and Matthias Schrör, with all the difficulties that such a task implies. Laudage's death brought to a premature end a distinguished career whose research interests went far beyond the reign of Barbarossa. It is possible to make a good guess at how Laudage intended his biography of Barbarossa to be by looking at his biography of Emperor Otto the Great, because the two works share the same publisher and their approach seems to have been similar.⁵ This suggests that the work was meant to be without footnotes in order to make it more appealing to a wider public. However, the death of the author prevented the inclusion of the extensive commentary (more than thirty pages long) that is to be found in his book on Otto the Great and constitutes part of its appeal. The map provided at the beginning of the volume under review is also the wrong one, because it does not portray the political geography of Europe and of the Mediterranean in the twelfth century as it claims, but instead that created by the Fourth Crusade. If this does not make an enormous difference for continental Europe, it does for the Byzantine Empire, whose emperor, Manuel Komnenos, was one of the main opponents of Frederick Barbarossa, not to mention that Frederick himself crossed the Byzantine lands to die in Anatolia

Federico I a Federico II. Die Anfänge des Öffentlichen Rechts: Von Friedrich Barbarossa zu Friedrich II (Bologna, 2009). In English, Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law 1200–1600: Sovereignty and Rights in the Western Legal Tradition* (Berkeley, 1993).

⁴ Johannes Laudage, *Alexander III. und Friedrich Barbarossa* (Cologne, 1997).

⁵ Id., *Otto der Grosse (912–973): Eine Biographie* (Regensburg, 2001).

during his fatal crusade. The last thirteen years of Frederick's reign are also examined quite briskly, but it should be kept in mind that, as already noted by the late Timothy Reuter, this is quite a common feature of works on Frederick Barbarossa because primary sources, such as the *Gesta Friderici*, written by Frederick's uncle, Otto of Freising, as well as Frederick's successes, are clustered in the first half of the reign.⁶

Yet the main problem of the unfinished manuscript was certainly the fact that Laudage had still to write the section concerning the period between the late 1160s and 1178, almost a quarter of Frederick's reign. While the decision not to fill the gap is perhaps understandable, this means that there is a ten-year void in the coverage of the book between chapters six and seven. This is not a trivial matter because what is missing is a decisive decade in Frederick's life, corresponding to the campaign in Italy that decided the conflict with the Lombard League and the papacy, sealing the fate of the Holy Roman Empire in Italy. In fact, this decade includes Frederick's defeat at the Battle of Legnano in 1176 by the army gathered by the Lombard League, which crippled any hope that Frederick had of prevailing over the Lombard cities by military force. As recently underlined by Paolo Grillo, the Battle of Legnano is also of great relevance for the history of warfare, not only because of its magnitude, but also because infantry-based civic militias prevailed against the cavalry-based imperial army at a period when warfare was dominated by aristocratic heavy cavalry.⁷ Laudage's biography of Emperor Frederick resumes after the Peace of Venice of 1177, which brought a final settlement with Alexander III, along with truces with the King of Sicily and the Lombard League that paved the way for the final settlement with the League six years later at the Peace of Constance. Indeed, the Peace of Venice was also a great international congress, as testified by the large number of participants from northern Italy as well as from Germany and various other kingdoms, including Sicily and England. There is no doubt that given his past expertise Laudage would have covered these momentous events more than appropriately.

⁶ Timothy Reuter, 'Mandate, Privilege, Court Judgement: Techniques of Rulership in the Age of Frederick Barbarossa', in id., *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. Janet Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), 430.

⁷ Paolo Grillo, *Legnano 1176: Una battaglia per la libertà* (Rome-Bari, 2010).

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As the work stands, the eight chapters, many of which are assigned catchy titles, are organized mainly chronologically. The first three deal respectively with Frederick's early life and rise to the throne, his coronation journey to Rome, the early years of the reign and the imperial Diet of Roncaglia in 1158, where Frederick unfolded what proved to be a doomed attempt to enhance imperial control over Italy by claiming a series of royal rights (*regalia*). The English translation of the title of this chapter about the Diet of Roncaglia reads 'Italy, or the Illusion of Reason'. In chapter four a thematic approach is preferred, examining the issues of chivalric culture, the imperial curia, economy and finance, and then rule and social praxis. The last four chapters are chronologically ordered again. The chapter 'The Turning Point of his Life' concerns the apex of Frederick's rule in Italy from the destruction of Milan in 1162, when he attempted to introduce a stable apparatus of government, to the disastrous conquest of Rome in 1167, after which the newly established apparatus crumbled in the Po Valley under the blows of the Lombard League. The chapter 'Phoenix from the Ashes' deals with Frederick's re-consolidation of his rule in Germany after his Italian setbacks before the new Italian campaign, which, as mentioned, is unfortunately missing. The last years of Frederick's reign are then examined, including the quarrel with Henry the Lion, the agreement with the Lombard League at the Peace of Constance in 1183, and the taking of the cross at Mainz in 1188. The title of the last chapter is self-explanatory: 'Crusade and Death.' This is followed by a conclusion that attempts to weigh up Frederick's experience, followed by a chronology of the most relevant events, an extensive bibliography, and an index.

Overall, Laudage put a great deal of effort into placing Frederick within the knightly culture of his time, often availing himself of the latest historiography, but his biography focuses mainly on Frederick's rule rather than on his life. It is not a particularly innovative work, but it shows that if Laudage had been able to finish it, the book would have succeeded both in appealing to the general educated public and in being useful to the academic community, as was the case with Laudage's previous book on Otto the Great. This in itself would have been no small achievement.⁸

⁸ A review of Laudage's *Otto der Grosse* may be found at <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/MA-2002-019>>, accessed 30 July 2010.

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